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AMERICAN AMATEUR DRAMA.

No. 1.

A BOLD STRATAGEM.

A COMEDY,

IN THREE ACTS.

BY

MARSDEN BROWN.

CHICAGO:
DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY.

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AMERICAN AMATEUR DRAMA.

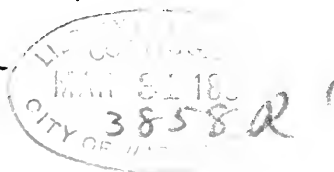
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1886

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A BOLD STRATAGEM.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

RICHARD FIELD.

EDWARD MARSHALL, *brother to Mrs. Field.*

MARK WILLIAMS, *Edward's friend*

GEORGE FIELD, *nephew to Richard Field.*

MRS RICHARD FIELD.

ALICE TAYLOR, }
ANNIE TAYLOR, } *Wards to Richard Field*

COSTUMES OF THE PRESENT DAY.

Time in representation, one hour and fifteen minutes.

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A BOLD STRATAGEM.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*Parlor in the house of RICHARD FIELD; handsomely furnished; doors, R., L. and C., and window, L.*

[EDWARD and MARK enter, C.]

EDWARD. Yes, old fellow, I am glad to see you, but I am sorry you came at this time.

MARK. Indeed! Then you would find my departure very convenient?

EDWARD. Not exactly that, Mark; but you should not have come during Mr. Field's absence.

MARK. I expected to find him here. But why should I not come during his absence?

EDWARD. Well, you remember how he evaded your request when you asked to be introduced to his wife?

MARK. Remember? Yes, only too well! I could see no reason why I should not know the sister of my best friend.

EDWARD. There was no reason—merely Field's ridiculous jealousy. He is suspicious of every man who even looks at his wife. If he finds you here, he will consider your presence as proof that you came by arrangement with Mrs. Field.

MARK. Oh, that's absurd!

EDWARD. Absurd, certainly; but how can you show him that it is not true?

MARK. By declaring to him my real purpose for coming: I am here to ask for the hand of his ward, Alice Taylor.

EDWARD. Well, perhaps that will do; though he will probably imagine it a pretense. But I admire your choice,

old fellow; Alice is charming—and her sister Annie, irresistible.

MARK. Herself, or her fortune?

EDWARD. Both. Of course you know that I would not marry for money—

MARK. Of course not!

EDWARD—but since she has a fortune I have tried very hard to love her.

MARK. Ha, ha, ha! Have you been successful?

EDWARD. Well, I have learned to love her, but she is promised to another. Her father, who was an intimate friend of Mr. Field, left to him his large fortune to be held in trust for his daughters until they married. If they married without their guardian's consent, they should not receive a dollar; and, moreover, they promised their father on his death-bed not to marry against the wishes of Mr. Field.

MARK. Does Field object to you?

EDWARD. Not that; but he has already promised her to his nephew, George Field. Several years ago, when scarcely more than a child, she was betrothed to him. This is his reward for acting as a spy for his uncle.

MARK. Then we both have Mr. Field's consent to win. Let us work together, and, if possible, win together.

EDWARD. Agreed! Now, Mr. Field must not find you here, and he will return within an hour. You go to that little arbor which you saw on the left as you came in. I'll join you there presently, and while we wait for his coming, we'll form our plans.

[*Exit* MARK, L.]

EDWARD. Now to see my little Annie—

ANNIE. [*Who has just entered.*] Yours! Indeed! How long since?

EDWARD. Ever since you told me that you love me.

ANNIE. When did I tell you that?

EDWARD. [*Extravagantly.*] Your eyes have told me. They are twin stars of hope, and beam on me glad tidings of promised happiness.

ANNIE. How singular! But why did you tell me to keep away?

EDWARD. When did I tell you that?

ANNIE. [*Imitating him.*] Your hair has told me. Your bright locks are a danger signal, warning me to keep off. [*She runs off, laughing.*]

EDWARD. [*He laughs with evident effort, until he perceives that she has gone, then stops suddenly.*] Confound my hair! I'll shave it off! No, I won't—I'll dye it! Not that, either, for then Annie would forever poke fun at the great light that would be put out. Some kinds of brightness are very unfortunate to the owner. [*Sees ANNIE enter.*] Ah, Annie—

ANNIE. Oh, Ed., Mr. Field has come—

EDWARD. When? Where? I didn't hear him.

ANNIE. I saw him enter the gate, and ran up the front stairs to tell Mrs. Field. But he came up the back way and we met on the landing. He told me to say nothing and sent me down. He said he wanted to give his wife a pleasant surprise.

EDWARD. Dear man! that's so like him; write to say he shall be at home on such a day, then come the day before—just to give his wife a pleasant surprise; glide into the house as if to steal his own spoons—all to give his wife a pleasant surprise. He'll be shot for a burglar some day, and that will give his wife a pleasant surprise. Annie, you misunderstood my signal light; it is not a danger signal, but a guide to a safe harbor. Come to—

[*Enter GEORGE.*]

ANNIE. Thank you, but there are plenty of other harbors—

GEORGE. That's so—here, for instance.

ANNIE—but for the present give me the wide ocean of liberty. Come, Ed., and show me the new flower-bed you promised. [*She takes EDWARD's arm.*]

GEORGE. Yes, show it to me, too; I like flowers. [*He puts ANNIE's disengaged hand within his arm. As they reach C. D., which is just wide enough for two, GEORGE is forced to relinquish ANNIE's hand. EDWARD looks back at GEORGE in smiling triumph. GEORGE shakes his fist at EDWARD's back and then follows.*]

[Enter MR. and MRS. FIELD, R.]

MR. F. [*Laughing.*] Ha, ha, ha! Pardon me, but I must laugh—ha, ha, ha!

MRS. F. But at what, my dear? I am delighted to see you so merry, but I cannot understand what particularly excites your risibility.

MR. F. Ha, ha, ha! I shall die with laughing—it's the most comical thing in the world.

MRS. F. What is comical? Certainly nothing you have told me. You say that old Jones is dead, and, contrary to expectation, has left his entire fortune to a gentleman who is distantly related to him—now what is comical in this story?

MR. F. Ha, ha, ha! It's not the story—but you asked me in such a careless manner—"Do you know the gentleman? Is he young?"—in a tone of such utter indifference, as if—ha, ha, ha!—as if it was of no earthly consequence to you—ha, ha ha!

MRS. F. Well, and of what earthly consequence can it be to me?

MR. F. None in the least, of course; that's the joke—ha, ha, ha! [*Aside.*] Shall I tell her?—I will—I'll mention the name suddenly, and mark the effect on her. [*Aloud.*] Why, the fact is, you know the gentleman—a very agreeable young man—Mr. Mark Williams.

MRS. F. Oh, indeed.

MR. F. [*Aside.*] The affected calmness of that, now! "Oh, indeed,"—as if she didn't care a straw for him; but—no, no, I see, she knew it before—there has been some communication. [*Aloud.*] Have you had any visitors in my absence, my dear?

MRS. F. You know I make it a point of never seeing any one in your absence.

MR. F. Now, there's an evasion—she can't give me a direct answer; he, or somebody from him, has been here, no doubt. [*Aloud.*] And why, Mrs. Field, do you make it a point of doing anything so silly? Why are our friends to be sent from our door, because I don't happen to be at home, as if they were so many thieves or swindlers? What are you afraid of—or rather what do you think I

am afraid of? For there it is, there it is, another proof of your ridiculous fancies, always conjuring up some visionary evil. I—ha, ha, ha!—I can't help laughing, though it annoys me, at the extreme folly of the thing. I, who during the three years of our married life, never laid the slightest constraint upon your pleasures, your inclinations—I, whose extreme anxiety to escape so odious a charge—

MRS. F.—Betrays the troubled source from whence it springs. Allow me to repeat, for perhaps the hundredth time since our marriage, that being as anxious to avoid affording you a pretense for jealousy, as you are to escape the suspicion of entertaining it, the unlimited freedom, to which you allude, has ever been and ever will be, until your nature changes, the most severe restriction that can be imposed upon my actions.

MR. F. Very well, madam, as you please. But my reputation shall not suffer for your folly. I will throw my doors open—they shall never be shut, night or day. I will write to Mark Williams, madam, Mark Williams, the gentleman whom you evidently think I fear; I'll invite him to my table, go abroad as soon as he comes, and leave you to do the honors. I'll—

[*Enter EDWARD.*]

EDWARD. Mr. Mark Williams.

MR. F. [*Aside.*] I knew it—I knew he was here! My wife—her confusion is evident. [*Aloud to EDWARD.*] Show Mr. Williams in immediately; I'm delighted to see him.

[*Enter MARK WILLIAMS.*]

My dear Williams, this is an unexpected pleasure, ha, ha, ha! and—the most curious coincidence possible; would you believe it—I was, at the moment of your arrival, telling Mrs. Field that I intended writing to you, and requesting the pleasure of your company a few days—ha, ha, ha!

MARK. [*Aside.*] Here's a reception!

EDWARD. [*Aside.*] So civil! Then there's no hope.

[*Exit.*]

MRS. F. [*Aside.*] Laughing again—then he's miserable.

MR. F. [*Aside.*] They dar'n't trust themselves to look at each other—a glance of the eye would speak volumes, and flash conviction on me at once. I'll make 'em look—if they are agitated—I— [*Aloud.*] Mrs. Field, Mr. Mark Williams, my dear. [*Mrs. F. and MARK bow politely, free from embarrassment.*] Admirably acted! Not the slightest emotion perceivable! The most brazen-faced thing I ever saw!

MRS. F. I have to congratulate Mr. Williams, I believe, upon the accession to some considerable property.

MARK. Indeed, madam, I do not consider it a subject for congratulation. The rightful heir has been most unjustly deprived of it, and as soon as the forms of the law will permit, I shall restore it to him.

MRS. F. [*Aside.*] Noble young man! How provoking that Richard's folly should deprive Alice of such a husband! [*Sighs.*]

MR. F. [*Starting.*] My wife sighed!

MARK. I am anxious to explain the object of this early visit. May I ask a few minutes' private conversation?

MR. F. Certainly, my dear sir, command me. [*Aside.*] He is anxious to explain—he feels I must suspect. [*Aloud.*] Will you walk into my study—my den, as I call it? You must be hungry after your long ride. My dear, will you kindly order refreshments in the dining room?

MARK. None for me, I beg of you, Mrs. Field. [*Laying his hand on her arm.*]

MR. F. [*Aside.*] He touched her hand! [*Aloud.*] You'll remain to dinner then?

MARK. Really, I—

MR. F. I'll hear no excuses, and Mrs. Field will feel slighted. This way, Mr. Williams.

[*Exeunt MARK and MR. FIELD.*]

MRS. F. What shall I do? Richard's jealousy grows worse and worse. I have not a friend, not an acquaintance, that he does not regard with suspicion and distrust.

[*Enter ALICE.*]

ALICE. Oh, Mrs. Field, Edward tells me that Mark is here and that he has sought an interview with my guardian.

MRS. F. Yes, and I have no doubt the interview concerns you.

ALICE. Of course the answer will be yes! Oh, I am so happy!

MRS. F. Do not be too sure. You know how insanely jealous Richard is; he imagines that Mr. Williams asks for your hand only that, as your lover, he may be able to see me often without arousing suspicion.

ALICE. Ridiculous!

MRS. F. So it is, but not therefore less disagreeable. However, you will soon know the result. [*Goes up.*]

ALICE. How absurd! With all his foolish fancies he cannot be such an imbecile as to imagine—or suppose it is true? Mrs. Field is still young and handsome, and Mark has always admired her. Can he be so base, so false—oh dear! I have such queer sensations—I—

[*Enter FIELD.*]

MR. F. [*Aside.*] I got rid of him nicely. His plan was too evident; he saw that I penetrated it, and retired in confusion.

MRS. F. [*In low tone to ALICE.*] Mark is crossing the lawn with Edward. You can meet him by going to the side door. [*Exit.*]

ALICE. [*Aside.*] Meet him! I won't. The mean, deceitful thing, I won't speak to him again—unless—unless it's not true—oh, there he is! [*She runs off, L.*]

MR. F. They communicate with each other and then go, without a word to me! No desire, no curiosity to know what Williams had to say! That confirms my suspicions. They have gone to meet him. I, too, will be there. Ha, ha, ha! They little think that I know their secret. But let them beware, for I shall not sleep until I have absolute proof of my wife's guilt or innocence.

[*Exit.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE.—*Lawn before RICHARD FIELD's house. Veranda at back, from which a door, c., opens into the house. Chairs on veranda. Trees, R. and L.*

[MARK and EDWARD discovered.]

MARK. All is lost, Ed. The old fellow rejected me, positively rejected me; said that he could not think of letting Alice marry any man who speculates. I offered to give up speculating. Thereupon he said that he would give his consent if I abstained from speculating one year. I accepted this condition gladly, but begged him in the meanwhile to allow me to visit his ward. At this he looked suspicious and hinted that I had some other object beside that of seeing Alice.

EDWARD. What did you say to that?

MARK. Say? I told him that he was cruel to his ward and unjust to his wife; then I could control myself no longer, and left in a rage. But I must see Alice before I go. Can't you contrive an interview?

EDWARD. Let me see—yes, I have it. His precious nephew is watching us now, so you must pretend to start for the city. Near the end of the hedge you will find an opening; enter there, and remain in the summer-house until I rejoin you. Leave the rest to me.

MARK. I'll rely on you. Did you give Alice my note?

EDWARD. Not yet; here it is. I have a plan. I'll contrive to let it fall into the governor's hands. He will read it and see that you are in earnest in your attentions to Alice. Perhaps thereby we can overcome his objections. But are you sure that it is explicitly addressed to her?

MARK. Perfectly. It is directed to her; and in it I call her "my own Alice." Could anything be plainer?

EDWARD. That will do. I'll tell Annie what we want, and she'll help us out.

[*Exeunt, L.*]

[*Enter RICHARD FIELD, C.*]

MR. F. The more I think on this business, the more I am puzzled. Can I be wrong? Can Mark Williams go

so far as to ask for Alice's hand merely to be near my wife? It seems improbable; and yet I can't forget that whenever he has seen them together his admiring glances have always been directed towards my wife. Were I to consent, he could call at my house whenever he might wish. No, 'tis better as it is; he has his answer, and is gone.

[*Enter GEORGE, R.*]

GEORGE. Oh, frightful, uncle! I've been watching to catch you alone.

MR. F. Eh? Why—what—what news? Some trifle or other about Annie, I suppose. I wonder that you are not ashamed to let people see your silly jealousy.

GEORGE. Not I! I say to all the world I'm jealous, and I say to you that I am jealous of that brother-in-law of yours—

MR. F. Edward? What of him? [*Aside.*] I want an excuse to get rid of him.

GEORGE. I caught him kissing Annie this morning.

MR. F. The rascal! And knowing that she is betrothed to you! I cannot allow in my house a man of such loose moral principles. I shall send him away—

GEORGE. Oh, my dear uncle, you are so kind! See, there he is now—he gives her a letter.

MR. F. A letter!

GEORGE. Yes, and it's the same that I saw Mark Williams have.

MR. F. [*Aside.*] Should it be to my wife! [*Aloud.*] Stand aside, stand aside.

GEORGE. I'll have it; I *will* have it.

MR. F. No, no; hush! [*Rushing forward.*]
[*Holding him back.*]

[*Enter ANNIE with a note, L.*]

ANNIE. [*Aside.*] Ah, there they are! And now to let my guardian see it and take it, as Edward bade me.

[*FIELD and GEORGE approach.*]

GEORGE. [*Snatching it.*] Traitress! [*Tears it open.*]

ANNIE. Don't do that; it is not for you. Give it to me. [*Snatches at and tears it.*]

MR. F. Stay, stay; what are you about?

[*All three struggle for it, and it is torn to pieces.*]

GEORGE. I know it is not for me, but you shall never read a line of it.

[*Tears his part of the note and stamps on it.*]

ANNIE. That's right—storm, do. It is not written to me, but to Alice.

MR. F. [*Looking at piece in his hand.*] It is so directed, certainly.

ANNIE. And I shall tell her at once what you have done with it. [*Exit.*]

GEORGE. I'll find out now. [*Picks up the pieces.*]

MR. F. What are you about there?

GEORGE. Picking up the bits to join them, and—

MR. F. Don't be a fool. Let them alone. Why don't you let them alone when I tell you? There's another piece there—I suppose you'll pick that up, too—ha, ha, ha! Was there ever such a booby? Here, give them to me.

GEORGE. Sir!

MR. F. Give them to me this minute. [*Snatching the pieces.*] And now leave them—you'll only see something to make you miserable—

GEORGE. But then—

MR. F. Go away, I tell you—you stupid, suspicious, teasing, troublesome idiot. [*Exit GEORGE. FIELD looks around to see that he is alone.*] Now, then, for it!

[*Draws forward chair and arranges pieces on it.*]

[*Enter EDWARD, L.*]

EDWARD. [*Aside.*] That foolish nephew of his has nearly spoiled everything. I hope that he will be able to make it out.

MR. F. Ah, that's it. [*Reading.*] "My own Alice, since you permit me to call you so." There, there! It's my wife he writes to, and she has desired him to call her by that name, for fear the notes should be intercepted.

EDWARD. [*Aside.*] Now, who could have thought it?

MR. F. [*Reading.*] "I am near you, but must remain concealed for the present. I burn to fold you to my

heart, but the jealousy of Mr. Field must not be awakened." There, then, is not that proof?

EDWARD. It's quite hopeless; the man's incurable.

[*Exit, L.*]

MR. F. My surmises were correct—he loves my wife. Ah, there she is! Now, if I can only catch her with the rascal.

[*Exit, c.*]

Enter MRS. F. and ALICE, R.

MRS. F. My dear child, do not despair yet. Your lover has brains and pluck. Depend upon it, he will not be thwarted in his desires. He is coming—leave us together a few minutes—

ALICE. But why alone? I should like to speak to Mark myself. And—and—perhaps it is you he loves—

MRS. F. You silly girl! Come, do as I ask, and all will be well.

ALICE. [*Aside.*] It doesn't look right. She is handsome, and perhaps he does—but I'll stay and watch.

[*Retires to R.*]

[*Enter MARK, L.*]

MRS. F. Ah, Mr. Williams, I am glad you have not left without a word with me—

[*FIELD opens c. door cautiously.*]

MARK. I could not. You must know that my affection is not of sudden growth. My love began, not with acquaintance, but with first sight. Hitherto I have adored and remained silent, but I can do so no longer. You will not permit your husband's jealousy to deprive me of my beloved—

ALICE. [*Coming forward.*] Oh, I can bear this no longer. So your love for me was a pretense—a—

[*Enter RICHARD FIELD, c.*]

MRS. F. Alice, you misunderstand—

MR. F. But I do not, madam. I have heard all. Sir, leave my grounds. If you enter here again, I will break every bone in your miserable carcass. I—I—oh, I shall go mad!

[*Exit, running.*]

[*Enter EDWARD.*]

MRS. F. All is lost now, indeed.

MARK. How could they so misunderstand? Alice is as unreasonable as her guardian.

EDWARD. Oh, don't despair yet! I have another plan. By a bold stratagem we may be victors yet.

MRS. F. What is your plan?

EDWARD. Why, this: Since they are so absurdly jealous, turn the tables on them; you be jealous of your husband, and Mark of Alice.

MRS. F. Just the thing! If Mr. Williams will assist me—

MARK. With all my heart.

MRS. F. Then come; we'll arrange our plan, and put it into instant execution. [*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter ALICE and ANNIE.*]

ALICE. Oh, Annie, I cannot think that Mark is false. He looks so noble and so true—it must be a mistake.

ANNIE. Oh, of course, your dear Mark is an angel! You had such good proof of his angelic qualities a few minutes ago! Edward doesn't amount to much, but I wouldn't exchange him for fifty Mark Williams. Such as he is, he is all mine.

ALICE. Indeed! I can assure you that no one cares to exchange with you.

ANNIE. Here comes your noble lord—I'll leave you to him and felicity. [*Exit.*]

[*Enter MARK.*]

ALICE. [*Aside.*] 'Tis he!

MARK. [*Aside.*] Yes, 'tis she—now for a touch of the pathetics. [*Aloud.*] Alice!

ALICE. What, sir! you here still, after my guardian's prohibition?

MARK. Yes, Alice. I have sought this interview—the dreadful truth has flashed upon my brain, and I could not leave you forever until I had pointed out to you the precipice on the brink of which you so unconsciously stand.

ALICE. [*Alarmed.*] What mean you?

MARK. Yes, Alice; I now see through the mystery of my refusal by your guardian. It is but too plain—his pretended jealousy of his excellent wife is a mere mask, under which he conceals the deformity of his own vices. I will not return your unjust suspicions of me by harboring for a moment the frightful thought that you encourage his disgraceful attentions—but—

ALICE. His attentions! His! Why Mark—Mr. Williams, I should say—what can you allude to?

MARK. Ah, Miss Taylor! beware, beware, while it is time! All ties are broken between us; your guardian's cruelty and your injustice have sundered hearts that death only should have divided. Common humanity alone has prompted me to this step. Alas! that eyes so bright as those—stars that seemed kindled but to light to happiness, should be fated to mislead and destroy. [*Aside.*] Pathos and perspiration! Tragedy's warm work in the dog-days.

ALICE. Mr. Williams, I am at a loss to understand.

MARK. I say those eyes have led your guardian astray.

ALICE. My guardian!

MARK. He loves you, unfortunate girl.

ALICE. Loves me! Mr. Williams, this is an insult.

MARK. Infatuated girl! I have spoken, and I am gone. I have fulfilled the last trying duty imposed upon me by expiring affection. I have set you on your guard—I care not for your indignation—I shall not stay to hear your reproaches; break, ere it is too late, the bonds which are invisibly entwining you! Argue with the miserable old man whom your charms have demented, and restore him to his unfortunate wife! Adieu, adieu forever!

[*Rushes out.*]

ALICE. Stay, sir, stay! Gone, really gone! I am thunderstruck! What could have caused such an absurd belief. Suspected of being the object of a married man's attention, my guardian! I'm horrified! I can't stay another hour under his roof. I must speak to him instantly.

[*Exit.*]

[*Enter* EDWARD.]

EDWARD. Cleverly done, by jingo! And now to catch this precious nephew.

[*Enter* GEORGE.]

EDWARD. [*Aside.*] No, no, no! I cannot bear the thought, though he is my rival, and though my hopes are all dashed to earth; still, I cannot bear to see him so cruelly imposed upon. Poor George!

GEORGE. [*Aside.*] Eh, what's that?

EDWARD. [*Aside.*] Wretched man! Alas! he little dreams that his uncle merely consents to his marrying Annie in order that he may more easily carry on his base designs against the peace and honor of his ward!

GEORGE. [*Aside.*] Oh heavens!

EDWARD. [*Aside.*] But how can I give him a hint of the misfortune that hangs over him? His suspicious nature will make him reject any communication of mine as a scandalous tale. Oh, could he but know how truly I pity him!

GEORGE. [*Aside.*] Oh!

EDWARD. [*Aside.*] But no, he would not believe me, and therefore the fatal secret must remain buried in this bosom forever.

[*Going.*]

GEORGE. Stay, Edward, stay! I do believe—

EDWARD. Hah, you there, George! I trust that you have not overheard anything. 'In my distress, I fear I spoke aloud, and—

GEORGE. I heard enough! But I'll be revenged—

EDWARD. Nay, do not be desperate. Remember he is your uncle—

GEORGE. No, no. I'll disown him—I'll not eat another crust of his bread.

EDWARD. What a noble spirit! Ah, George, how much I have mistaken you. Nothing elicits the fine points of a man's character like adversity. But, oh woman! woman! that a girl blessed with the love of such a man should yield to the temptations of an aged libertine.

GEORGE. The jilt!—I'll go to them at once.

EDWARD. Stay, you have no proof but my bare asser-

tion. But, alas! it is in my power to convince the most skeptical of men. With shame I speak it—I was the innocent bearer of his written entreaties.

GEORGE. You?

EDWARD. I. Little imagining its contents, I consented to be the bearer of a letter from him to Annie.

GEORGE. A letter?

EDWARD. Yes; containing a declaration, appointing a meeting—

GEORGE. Damnation!

EDWARD. It nearly fell into your hands.

GEORGE. It did?

EDWARD. Yes; at a distance I beheld you snatch it from her, but—

GEORGE. I recollect—here—on this very spot.

EDWARD. It is but too true. Your uncle obtained part of it and you destroyed the rest.

GEORGE. I did; he wouldn't let me see the pieces; took them from me, and called me a jealous blockhead! I'll expose him—I'll—

EDWARD. The meeting was to be in his study. If you were to steal down there and find them together.

GEORGE. I'll do it—

EDWARD. And if I can hit upon a pretext to be there myself, I'll assist you to expose him.

GEORGE. Thanks, thanks, my dear friend; thanks! I will be there on time—let him look out. [*Exit.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*The Library. FIELD discovered, seated.*

MR. F. I've found her out, and I'm miserable. For three years I have suspected, and now I have discovered what I long dreaded to know—my wife is not true to me. Oh that I had not suspected, that I had not heard! Far better the happiness of ignorance than the misery of knowledge. [*Knock at door.*] Who's there?

[*Enter ANNIE, opening door cautiously.*]

ANNIE. Mr. Field—

MR. F. What brings you here? What do you want? Go away—I don't want to be interrupted.

ANNIE. But if you please, Mr. Field; you always told me to ask questions when I don't understand—

MR. F. What do you not understand?

ANNIE. Oh, something very strange indeed!

MR. F. [*Aside.*] Perhaps she can tell me something about my wife. [*Aloud.*] Well, come in, and shut the door. Now speak—what is it?

ANNIE. Indeed, I'm so frightened I hardly can speak.

MR. F. [*Excitedly.*] Pshaw! don't be frightened; be calm and collected, as you see I am, now speak.

ANNIE. Well, then— [*Aside.*] I don't know what to say to keep him talking until somebody comes. [*Aloud.*] In the first place, you must promise not to tell any mortal soul how you came to know it.

MR. F. Yes, yes, yes—of course, of course!

ANNIE. Because it would be the ruin of me, if—

MR. F. I'll be cautious—I give you my word of honor nobody shall know. So go on; what have you seen and heard?

ANNIE. Dear me! how I do tremble!

MR. F. Confound your trembling! So do I—with curiosity. Now speak, do.

ANNIE. Well, then, Mr. Field, you must know—but if you are very, very busy, I'll come some other time.

MR. F. No, no, no! I'm not busy; go on—go on.

[*Knock at the door.*]

ANNIE. [*Aside.*] Ah, it's all right. [*Aloud.*] Oh dear, there's some one at the door! What shall I do? Where shall I go? If anyone sees me here, it will be known who told you.

MR. F. But you haven't told me.

ANNIE. It doesn't signify; it's just the same thing—I shall be ruined. Let me run in in here.

[*Opening closet door.*]

MRS. F. In there—no!

[*Knocking again.*]

ANNIE. There, they're knocking again—I'll never open my lips if you don't.

MR. F. Well, well, in there, in with you! I'll soon get rid of them, whoever they are. [*Puts ANNIE in closet.*] Who's there? What do you want?

ALICE. [*Without.*] Oh, Mr. Field, I must speak with you at once.

MR. F. [*Aside.*] Alice! [*Aloud.*] Can't you come by and by? I'm very busy—I—

ALICE. No, sir, no; my business will admit of no delay—I must have an immediate explanation.

MR. F. [*Opening door.*] What's all this about? Out with it at once, then, and be brief, for my business is important.

[*Enter ALICE.*]

ALICE. Mr. Field, I am greatly distressed; there are reports about most injurious to both our reputations, and I lose no time in requesting you to deny and suppress them.

MR. F. Reports! Reports! What sort of reports?

ALICE. Such, sir, as bring tears of shame and indignation into my eyes. It is said that your refusal of Mr. Williams arises from—oh, I can't utter the vile insinuation!

MR. F. You alarm me, Miss Taylor. Speak out, I beg of you. What do they dare to insinuate?

ALICE. That you have an affection for me that is not a father's or a friend's—for me, your ward. See what your extraordinary conduct has subjected me to!

MR. F. By all that's exasperating! They're slanderers, base slanderers. I accused of loving the daughter of my dearest friend! No, no, it's absurd. Alice, some one has been lying. I defy the tongue of scandal to bring one incident against the fair name of Richard Field.

[*ANNIE coughs in closet.*]

ALICE. What's that?

MR. F. That! What?

ALICE. Did you hear nothing?

MR. F. No; did you?

ALICE. I could have sworn some one coughed in this room.

MR. F. Coughed! oh, to be sure; was that all? Yes, I coughed. [*Coughs.*] I have a terrible cold. [*Aside.*] If that girl coughs again she will be discovered, and then they will believe anything.

ALICE. Well, your unreasonable objections to the proposal of Mr. Williams have placed me at least in a very annoying situation; and however confident you may feel in the stability of your own reputation, I must entreat you, for my sake, to listen to reason. I am convinced that I was unjustly jealous and suspicious, and confess my error. Won't you write to him and confess yours? Give your permission to our marriage, and you will atone for your error.

MR. F. What, apologize to Mark Williams after that disgraceful scene!

[ANNIE coughs again.]

ALICE. There, again! You didn't talk that time.

MR. F. [*Aside.*] Distraction! [*Aloud.*] No, no; that was some one else—in the garden, I suppose—I—Miss Taylor, you have my answer—and so has Mr. Williams. I am busy; I would be alone; I must entreat you to—

ALICE. But I cannot take that answer! You force me, you compel me to say—that—that—oh, what a cruel situation!

MR. F. [*Aside.*] It is a cursed situation! They'll drive me mad, between them. [*Aloud.*] Alice, don't be silly, don't cry, don't give way so.

ALICE. [*Sobbing, and flinging herself into the arm chair.*] Oh, oh, oh! I shall be ruined!

MR. F. [*Aside.*] So shall I!

ALICE. My heart will break! I feel it! I shall faint—I'm sure I shall.

MR. F. [*Aside.*] Would to heaven she would! I could let the other out before she came to again. [*Knock at the door.*] Some one else! [*Aloud.*] Alice, arise directly! What will people think?

ALICE. You don't care what they think.

MR. F. I do, I do! [*Knock.*] Who's there?

[*Enter EDWARD.*]

EDWARD. I beg your pardon, but I must speak with you immediately.

MR. F. Not now—I'm engaged.

EDWARD. Alice here! Then it's all true!

MR. F. Ten thousand furies! What do you mean by "true"? I'll make you dance for this impertinence!

EDWARD. Unhappy old man!

MR. F. Infernal young scoundrel! Will you go out?

EDWARD. No, sir; not until I have said what I came to say. Your wife—my sister—is coming here.

MR. F. Well, what of that?

EDWARD. Everything. She is my sister, and I do not want her happiness destroyed forever by what, after all, may be a fatal mistake.

MR. F. Fatal nonsense! What do you mean?

EDWARD. Your wife has the unfortunate idea that you are in love with Alice.

MR. F. There, there, there! I am lost!

EDWARD. Wretched pair, what can I do to save you?

MR. F. Save us? Save yourself, you villain, or I'll knock your brains out!

EDWARD. She comes! Let me beseech you, for your own sakes—

ALICE. Mrs. Field! I suspected her; what charity can I hope for at her hands? Where shall I fly?

EDWARD. Suppose you run in here a few minutes. [*Steps toward closet.*]

MR. F. [*Jumping before it.*] No, no, no! Let her come; let all the world come. Conscious innocence has nothing to fear.

EDWARD. Innocence! Did conscious innocence protect your wife against your jealousy?

MR. F. Jealousy!

ALICE. It's too true.

EDWARD. Yes, sir; jealousy. She must not see you together. [*Steps to other closet.*] Here's room here—just one moment—

MR. F. No, no, no!

EDWARD. [*To ALICE, who hesitates.*] Go in, there's no

danger—only a hoax—mum! *[Pushes her in and shuts door.]*

[Enter MRS. FIELD.]

MRS. F. Edward, only Edward! I'm too late, then!

MR. F. Too late for what, madam? To what am I to attribute this intrusion?

MRS. F. Intrusion, indeed! Edward, please leave us alone.

MR. F. Stay, sir; stir not, I command you!

MRS. F. Oh, very well! With all my heart, if you want everybody to know it. I have at last found a clue to your conduct. Your denial of jealousy was more sincere than I imagined! I have cause to wonder on what point of my behavior you could found your suspicions. The whole was but a deep-laid scheme to cloak your own proceedings. Mr. Field, have I deserved such treatment?

MR. F. Go on, madam, go on! My conscience acquits me of the charge.

MRS. F. The charge! Has anyone, then, warned you of the discovery of your plans? or does the conscience, to which you allude, point out the vulnerable spot? What about your ward, sir, Alice Taylor?

MR. F. Mrs. Field, you have been deceived; or you have entered into a plot with that precious brother of yours to annoy me. For myself, I scorn to make any defense.

MRS. F. Nay, don't misunderstand me. I have no doubt of Alice's innocence. But how long would your attentions allow her to remain so?

MR. F. Why, madam!

MRS. F. Will you deny that you had an appointment with her?

MR. F. I will—I do.

MRS. F. That she has not been seen to enter this study?

MR. F. That's another thing. She has been here, she is here.

MRS. F. Here! and concealed! In this closet, no doubt—

MR. F. No, madam, not here—

MRS. F. Where then?

ALICE. [*Running out of closet.*] Here, but indeed—

MRS. F. And have you the confidence to tell me—

MR. F. Now, sir, if you do not wish to be thrashed, tell immediately how this young lady came in that closet.

EDWARD. Certainly, sir; I will speak the truth, and nothing but the truth.

MR. F. Well, sir, go on. Who put that young lady in the closet?

EDWARD. I did.

MRS. F. You, and for what reason, pray?

EDWARD. To prevent the very scene which has unfortunately taken place.

MR. F. To cause it, you mean, you rascal! But go on; and tell one lie, if you dare!

EDWARD. I scorn a lie, sir. [*To Mrs. F.*] I came here to warn your husband of your suspicions and your approach.

MRS. F. Oh, you did? and why, pray?

MR. F. And who asked you to do that?

EDWARD. Perhaps I was wrong, but I did it with good intentions. I found Alice in tears, and Mr. Field in confusion.

MRS. F. So, so, so!

MR. F. Well, what of that?

MRS. F. And so you act as a spy on your own sister—you are placed as an outpost to warn my husband of my approach—

MR. F. But, my dear wife—

ALICE. There, sir, you see where you have placed me.

MR. F. But Alice—oh, confound it—this is absurd! Must the fair edifice of my reputation be hurled to earth with a crash—

[*A crash is heard in closet—all start.*]

MRS. F. What's that?

MR. F. I say, with a crash!

MRS. F. With a crash, indeed! Why, there's somebody in that closet! Pray, did Edward conceal another lady against your consent? [*Opening door.*] Annie, as I live!

ALICE. Annie!

EDWARD. [*Very loud.*] Annie!

[*Enter* GEORGE.]

GEORGE. Annie!

MR. F. It's all over with me.

ANNIE. I beg pardon, but indeed—and indeed—

MRS. F. Silence!

ANNIE. Don't be angry, George.

GEORGE. Don't come near me—I shall do you harm—
oh, you villain—

MR. F. So I must bear all this, must I?

ALICE. [*Aside, to whom* MRS. FIELD *has been whispering*] If that is the case, I'll help you with all my heart. [*Aloud.*] Oh, Mr. Field, you have a cough, have you! a terrible cough! Well, after this, I shall believe anything.

MR. F. Appearances, I confess, are against me; whether arising from plot, I cannot pretend to know—

MRS. F. Oh, that evasion!

MR. F. Confound it, madam, hear me speak! I say, appearances from which a suspicious mind might certainly draw inferences anything but favorable to my character; but, I trust, you have too much—too much generosity to—

MRS. F. Really, Mr. Field, you cannot expect me to have greater sense or generosity than my husband. Why should I not be led by appearances as well as yourself? Why should be deprived of the pleasure, for such you seem to think it, of jealousy and suspicion? No, sir; for three years I have trusted you implicitly, and if I have now lost my confidence in you, you have yourself to thank for it.

MR. F. I may have been in the wrong—I say, I *may* have been in the wrong. You will make me most happy if you can convince me that my suspicions are as unfounded as yours.

MRS. F. It is in your power to convince both yourself and me at the same time. Give your consent to Mr. Williams, and you will relieve us both from doubt as to the mutual affection of him and Alice. As to Annie, I own that—

MR. F. Oh, as to Annie, George shall marry her at once—and then—

GEORGE. No, no; I've done with her and you. I won't sleep under your roof another night.

MR. F. Why, you rascal! do you presume to hint—

GEORGE. I don't hint. I speak out. I say you are a wicked old man—

MRS. F. You see!

ANNIE. What, won't you have me, George? Won't you?

GEORGE. No, no, no!

MR. F. The fellow's mad—stark mad! But who will have her, then? Somebody must, for I won't have her on my hands any longer.

EDWARD. Well, to oblige you, and to convince you that I at least have no jealousy in my disposition, I don't mind if I have her.

MR. F. My dear Edward!

GEORGE. You will?

MR. F. Turn that fellow out, turn him out this minute.

GEORGE. What, you will really have her—after what—

EDWARD. You heard him. My dear George, you must go.

GEORGE. But I say—

EDWARD. Say nothing.

GEORGE. But I must—

EDWARD. Go out.

MR. F. Out with him. [*Pushes him to EDWARD, who pushes him toward door; MARK enters, and pushes him out.*] You may have Annie—take her and be happy.

MRS. F. And why not make yourself happy by giving Alice to the man who loves her?

MR. F. Enough! Mr. Williams, there's my ward; take her, and say no more about it.

MARK. And will Alice, then, forgive the little plot which had her happiness for its aim?

ALICE. Oh, Mark, I am ashamed of my folly, and would rather ask *your* forgiveness.

MR. F. Plot! There was a plot, then, to make me ridiculous?

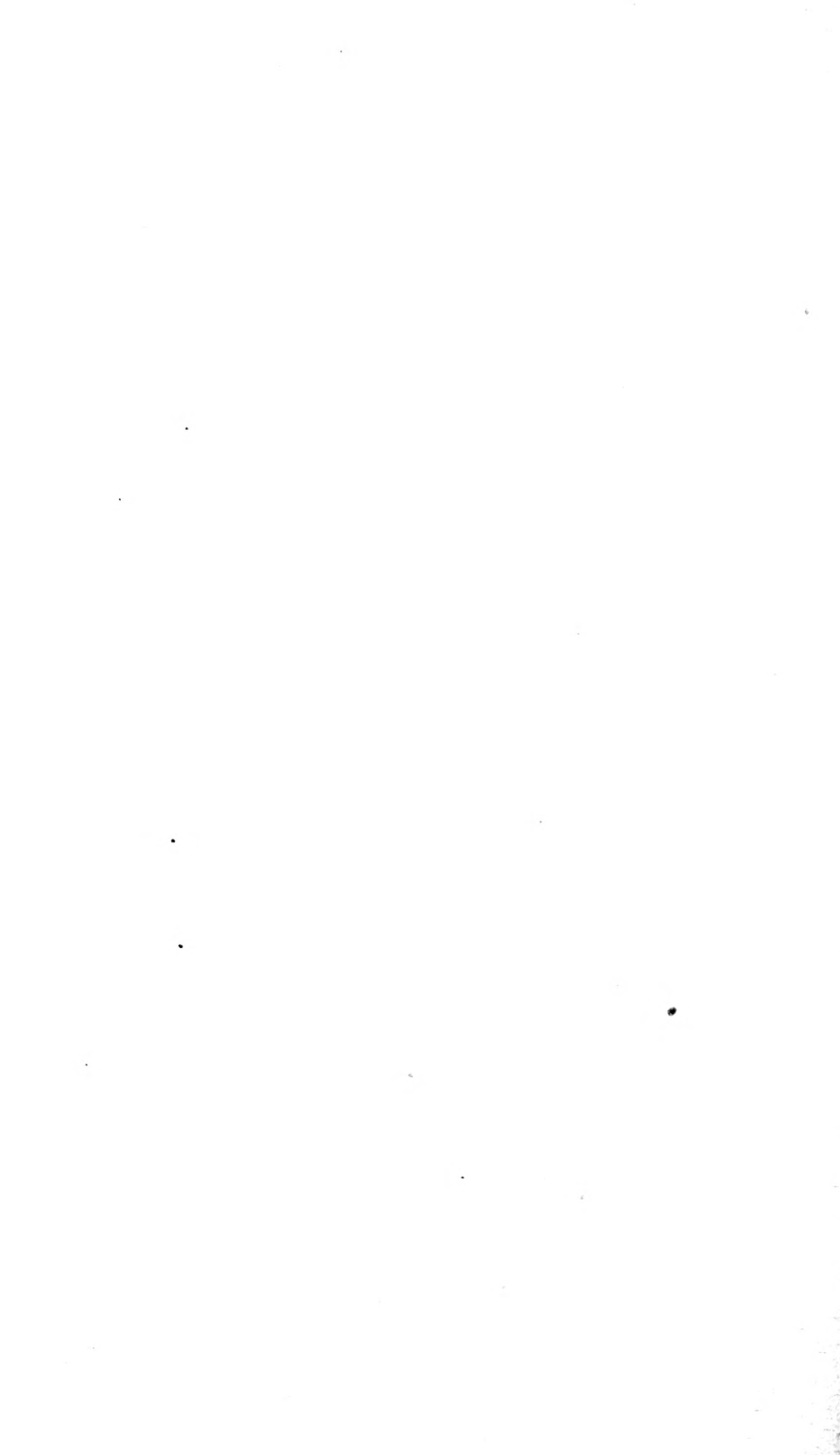
MRS. F. No, my dear husband, to prevent your mak-

ing yourself so; your secret is in the keeping of those you have rendered happy; gratitude will seal their lips. Nothing but a return of your suspicions can make your jealousy known to the world.

Mr. F. Then I am satisfied. My dear wife, I have loved you so dearly that I cannot love you more, but one thing I promise: I will no longer distrust you, but will repose in you complete confidence, which, after all, is the highest proof of love.

CURTAIN.











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